



Picasso's Don Quixote

“IMPOSSIBLE DREAM”

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

In 1996, I moved to Missouri and purchased a cattle ranch in the Missouri Ozarks, which I eventually had certified as an organic grass-fed beef operation. At the time, I had no idea of Missouri’s involvement in the Civil War. I had always had a passing interest in Civil War history and had read a handful of popular novels by celebrity historians. I had even visited a few battle sites in the Eastern Theater, including Gettysburg (which I visited several times, including on an instructor-guided tour while a student at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.) Having read nothing but books covering the Eastern Theater, I wrongly thought the Western Theater of that war was merely a sideshow.

Ten years after moving to Missouri, when my nine-year-old grandson was visiting, we took a trip to the National Park Service’s Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, outside Springfield, Missouri. After watching the Visitor Center film and the terrain board light show, we toured the battlefield. I was impressed enough by the battle to want to learn more, so I purchased a book about the battle and another about the Union general killed in it, General Nathaniel Lyon of Eastford, Connecticut. For my grandson, I purchased a child’s *Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield Activity Book* and a Civil War board game.



My grandson Ryan and I playing a board game after visiting the battlefield.

From the child’s activity book, my grandson and I learned that “Slavery was simply a form of labor that supplied farmers with workers to harvest crops, process hemp and tobacco, and haul water.” We also learned that General Lyon “...was not liked

by those who served with him [and that] his excessive punishments of enlisted men caused other officers to separate themselves from him,” a fact confirmed by the two books I had purchased for myself.

At the time I read the two books, I saw no reason to question their accuracy. They were both well-footnoted nonfiction books by academically credentialed history professors specializing in Civil War history. I was also under the impression that editors and publishers had systems, like peer reviews, to ensure that what they published was accurate. As a retired Army officer, I was disappointed to learn that an officer like Lyon was providing visiting youth with their first example of an Army officer and the type of person they might serve under if they joined the Army.

After finishing those two books, I was sufficiently interested in Lyon and the battle to start looking into both. However, instead of relying on modern writings, I sought out books and articles by Civil War veterans and by writers who lived through the war or had access to living veterans. I also began reading unit histories prepared by veterans of those units. As a result, it soon became clear that what modern writers produced differed from the majority of what Civil War veterans had written. For example, within the period books I was reading, both sides of the conflict clearly respected Lyon, praising his character, leadership, and bravery, whereas modern writers were villainizing him. Below are examples of both interpretations.

Modern negative comments:

1990: In *Damned Yankee*, Christopher Phillips wrote:

Lyon's draconian punishments were widely known in the ranks, earning for him a reputation as 'the most tyrannical officer in the Army.' (page 88)

2000: In *Wilson's Creek*, William G. Piston and Richard W. Hatcher III wrote:

Lyon had an aggressive personality that combined with an obsessive sense of duty to make him a true martinet. ...When enforcing discipline he was a sadist.

2006: In *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*, William Marvel wrote:

On the other side was Nathaniel Lyon, a captain in the 2nd U.S. Infantry and an insubordinate, self-righteous psychopath. Lyon's erratic record reflected his unstable personality....

Positive comments by veterans of the Civil War on both sides:

1914: In *Ten Years in the Ranks, U. S. Army*, Augustus Meyer wrote:

Captain Lyon was of a most peculiar temperament. While he preserved a fatherly attitude toward his company and saw to their comfort, he was very exacting. The least infringement of rules, which other officers would not notice, he would punish. He seldom put any of his men in the guard-house, except for some serious offense, but punished them by making them do menial duties....

1861: In *The Last Political Writings of Gen. Nathaniel Lyon*. Rudd & Carleton:

The body of General Lyon was laid out in state at the camp, at the close of this bloody day, and not an officer or private but shed bitter tears as they gazed on their dead general, almost idolized by every man of them from the highest to the lowest.

1886: In *The Fight for Missouri*, Colonel Thomas L. Snead, who fought on the Confederate side during the Battle of Wilson's Creek, wrote:

He was the greatest man I ever saw in my life. ...had he not been willing to die for the freedom of the Negro and for the protection of the Union, none of these things would have been done. By wisely planning, by boldly doing, and bravely dying, he had won the fight for Missouri.

While there are many reasons for the disparity between modern writers and those who were actually involved in the Civil War, covering them at this time is beyond the scope of this introduction. They will be covered in follow-up writings.

Some people today have no idea of Missouri's significance in the run-up to the Civil War. Both the North and South were laser-focused on whether Missouri would secede or not. Rather than await an attack by secessionist forces under the governor's control, Captain Nathaniel Lyon took the first Union action against the slave powers by surrounding a secessionist encampment at Camp Jackson and taking 669 prisoners, which he eventually paroled. That was followed by forces under now-General Lyon driving the secessionist governor and his followers out of the state capital and into the far southwest corner of the state, fighting three historically significant battles in less than three months. Two of those battles were fought before the Battle of Bull Run in the Eastern Theater. (See map GM-13 on page XXX.)

The nation's attention being focused on Missouri is demonstrated well in the two volumes of Series 4 of the *Missouri Speaks Collection* (*New York Tribune* articles concerning Missouri, published in 1861). However, by the end of 1861, the country's attention had moved away from Missouri, and only suffering remained. In December 1861, a letter to an editor of the *Missouri Republican* newspaper closed with the following comment concerning General Lyon's place in history.

The present time is pregnant with vast events. Battles are imminent, which will throw the story of Wilson's Creek into the shade. But whatever events shall happen, whatever triumphs or reverses to the nation, after this war shall have spent itself, and the blinding passions of this crisis shall have cleared away, there are some names which mankind will not willingly let die; and among them, the martyrs of constitutional liberty, posterity will write the name of LYON.¹

After discovering the disparity mentioned above, I naively began searching for a historian or published writer focused on the Civil War with whom I could share what I had discovered about Lyon. However, I ran into a brick wall. When I asked a historian at the Wilson's Creek Battlefield if he knew anyone working on recovering General Lyon's reputation, I was mocked for believing Lyon's reputation was redeemable. When I said, "You can't possibly believe that Lyon's staff had to restrain him to prevent him from riding across the battlefield to personally attack the enemy commander on the other side," I was told I could believe whatever I wanted. Another time, I received a tongue-lashing from a government historian at the Army Center for Military History in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He arrogantly told me that if I don't like what Christopher Phillips has written, I should write my own book. I later noted that Phillips had thanked this government historian for his help with the book in his introduction. It began to appear to me that one of the requirements for carrying the moniker of a modern Civil War historian was to believe that Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, the first Union general killed in the war, was an erratic, self-righteous psychopath solely responsible for the disaster that befell Missouri during the Civil War.

After my experience at the Army Center for Military History, I decided that if Lyon's reputation was going to be recovered, I had to do it myself. While I had no problem taking on such an effort, I was not an academic or a historian and had never written anything for publication. I was an organic cattle rancher living in the Missouri Ozarks, far away from any research facility. Nevertheless, I decided to make an effort, even though I was not sure I had either the time or the writing skills required to produce anything anyone would be interested in. Actually, I felt a little like Don Quixote in Picasso's sketch above.

¹ "In Memoriam," *Missouri Republican*, December 13, 1861.

As my goal was only to recover Gen. Lyon's reputation, not to become a published writer, and being 67-years-old, I decided that rather than merely gathering the documents, I needed to write a book; I would organize my research so it would be available for others to use after I passed. That way, whether I was successful or not, my research would be available so that others could recover Lyon's reputation. The idea behind this plan was that while I would eventually pass, the truth would survive, and Lyon's reputation would eventually be restored.

After I sold my Ozark ranch in late 2009, I traveled across the country, visiting historical centers, libraries, and repositories that housed Civil War documents. Traveling in my recreational vehicle, I visited several places in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Illinois. I visited Connecticut and West Point twice, and on several occasions, I spent multiple weeks at the National Archives in Washington. At each location, I gathered documents about Lyon's life and events occurring in Missouri during the Civil War.

In the spring of 2010, I returned to Missouri and rented some office space in Bolivar, fifty miles from Springfield and sixty-five miles from the Wilson Creek Battlefield. With the help of a very talented lady, Teresa Veleces, I began organizing and cataloging the documents I had collected. Having visited dozens of used bookstores during my travels, I had a treasure trove of obscure Civil War-subject books written between 1860 and 1920 that needed to be reviewed, cataloged, and shelved. That collection grew over time to include modern books I came across that contained information on Lyon or Missouri. As time went by, my focus shifted to include more of Missouri in general, but more specifically, its relationship with Washington and the Lincoln Administration. That new focus caused my book collection to exceed 1,500 books.

In 2011, after organizing the documents I had collected into binders, I decided to digitize everything so as to use the Internet to organize the material and create a shareable work platform. For example, one person would search a microfilm roll for documents of interest. Once a document was located, it would be posted to one of our online files. Later, another person would transcribe the document and return it to the file. Next, a decision would be made about where to place the document. Finally, the document would be formatted for our presentation system, with footnotes, maps, and editor's notes, as shown below.

September 1, 1861.



John C. Fremont



James H. Lane

(FLP: Ser 2PS-Sep#1)

September 1, 1861

**Kansas Governor Robinson to
Maj. Gen. Fremont**

O.R., I, 3:468:69

[Finding Aid Summary]

Robinson indicates that the secessionists in Missouri will not invade Kansas or cause problems, as long as the government stores at Fort Scott are sent back to Leavenworth, and Gen. James Lane's forces are kept out of Missouri. He requests that Fremont move military supplies at Fort Scott to Fort Leavenworth and that Lane not be allowed to enter Missouri.

[Important Quote From Letter]

"As some parties are interested to have war on our border, and consequently may not be impartial in their reports [to you], I desire to say that we are in no danger of invasion [from Missouri], provided the government supplies at Fort Scott are..."

[Letter]

State of Kansas, Executive Office, Topeka,

Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont:

Dear Sir: An effort is being made to get up a panic in our state, and I am told messengers have been sent to you representing a fearful state of things on our border. As some parties are interested to have war on our border, and consequently may not be impartial in their reports [to you], I desire to say that we are in no danger of invasion [from Missouri], provided the government supplies at Fort Scott are sent back to Leavenworth and Gen. Lane's brigade is removed from the border region. It is true small parties of secessionists are to be found in Missouri, but we have good reason to know that they do not intend to molest Kansas in force until Jackson shall be reinstated as governor of Missouri. Indeed, when a short time since a guerrilla party came over and stole some property from our citizens, the officers in command of the Confederates compelled a return of the property and offered to give up the leader of the gang to our people for punishment. But what we have to fear, and do fear, is that Lane's [Kansas Jayhawk] brigade will get up a war by going over the line [into Missouri], committing depredations, and then returning into our state...

Editor's Note: An extract of a report from Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, commander of the Department of Missouri to President Lincoln:

*"The conduct of the forces under Lane and Jennison has done more **for the enemy** in this state than could have been accomplished by 20,000 of his own army. I receive almost daily complaints of outrages committed by these men **in the name of the United States**, and the evidence is so conclusive as to leave no doubt of their correctness...."*

(FLP: Ser 2PS-Dec#157)

Without Teresa's computer skills and ideas, the internet actions mentioned above may not have been completed. Early on, even before we started using the Internet as a work platform, Jackie Worth joined our team and is still working with us fifteen years later. Jackie is a jack-of-all-trades and does everything well. For example, I had spent years trying to find someone who could produce maps for us without luck. Then one day, I casually mentioned my frustration at not being able to get maps into our *Missouri Speaks Collection*; upon hearing that, Jackie said she could probably make them. As of today, she has created over 300 maps, and we now have an atlas volume containing her work. I was obsessed with the need for maps to bring military actions to life, so Jackie was a Godsend to my efforts. I also have a strong desire to give users of our work an opportunity to develop an appreciation for the unique nature of Missouri's topography and for the influence it had on the events that transpired during the war.

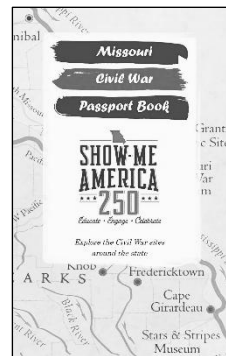
In 2015, I attended a meeting at the Missouri State Historical Society's headquarters to discuss the possibility of the society eventually taking over the Fry's Lyon Project website. But due to the complexity of maintaining such a website, it was determined that making such an arrangement would probably not be possible. However, it was suggested that if I wanted the information we had gathered to be made available to researchers, it needed to be put in writing.

Shortly after that meeting, I moved from Missouri to Florida, but since we were now working exclusively online, nothing really changed, except that I had taken the State Historical Society's suggestion to heart and was ready to start converting our website into written form. First, I took a class on self-publishing using Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing. Next, I placed an ad in a local Florida newspaper seeking transcribers to convert the website into Microsoft Word, which was necessary to publish books using the Kindle system. Thanks to unbelievable luck, an amazing lady answered my ad, Blanca Madani. Blanca took my general ideas and produced the layout we used in the 70-plus volumes we are now ready to publish ten years after she started helping me. Without Blanca's talents, work ethic, and drive, there is a good possibility our work would never have gone beyond the Internet stage. Even though the Internet is the preferred research tool today, books will always be useful, and bringing them together has significantly improved our Internet presentation.

In 2019, at the suggestion of board member Mel Gilbert, an attorney from Buffalo, Missouri, we, in collaboration with Missouri Tourism and the State Park System, launched the Missouri Civil War Passport Program. Our Civil War passport book² is similar to the National Park Service Passport Book used to log visits to National Park Service sites. In conjunction with the release of our passport book, we published for the first time the goals and objectives of Fry's Lyon Foundation Inc., as seen below.



Cover of the Bicentennial edition of the Passport Book, released in 2021



Cover of the Show-Me America edition of the Passport Book, released in 2026

FRY'S LYON FOUNDATION, INC.

Fry's Lyon Foundation, Inc. is an IRS 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt private operating foundation with three elements focused on educating the general public on the role Missouri played in the American Civil War. The first element is the *Civil War Passport Book*, first released in 2019 to encourage Civil War tourism in Missouri and support those working to make information about Missouri's involvement in that conflict available to the public. The second element is the *1861 Missouri Speaks Collection*, a 70-plus volume series intended to be Missouri's most extensive repository of consolidated primary source documents available for the study of Missouri's political and military situation during the run-up to and the first year of the Civil War. These books are organized to interest the layman

² The passport books are available at Amazon.com.

while still being useful to every category of researcher; they contain summaries, explanatory notes, and a large number of pictures and maps to make them user-friendly. Third, is a website (1861MissouriSpeaks.com) which will provide access to the Collection and will contain an errata sheet for revisions.

The third edition of the Passport Book was released in January 2026. This edition was released under the umbrella of Missouri's Show-Me America 250 Celebration Committee. It features sites not introduced in earlier volumes. It is worth noting that participants who visit the sites listed and have their book stamped at each location receive a certificate of completion signed by Missouri's lieutenant governor. See the latest edition for details concerning the awarding of certificates, or visit the website supporting the passport books (mo-passport.org). This site contains all the information contained in the book, plus additional information and enlarged copies of the maps.

Finally, even though our foundation is a tax-deductible IRS 501 (C) (3) educational private foundation, no one else has spent a cent up to this point or even had the opportunity to volunteer their support. It would be helpful if users who are able can make a tax-free contribution to the foundation from time to time. If anyone is aware of any grants that may be available to help fund our efforts, let us know. As an example of the costs involved in a project like ours, we once paid \$40 to Yale University for a copy of a letter written by Captain Lyon.

Contributions can be made through Zeffy.com.

Go to <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/donation-form/support-1861-missouri-speaks>.

Emails concerning this project can be sent to: 1861MissouriSpeaks@gmail.com.